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R 191532Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1380
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 1576
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/19/2012

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM ZI

SUBJECT: GOZ'S NEGATIVE REACTION TO CATHOLIC CHURCH'S PASTORAL LETTER

REF: HARARE 284

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

¶1. (SBU) The hard-hitting pastoral letter (Ref) of the Catholic Bishops Conference was made public on April 12 and read by priests in churches throughout the country on Sunday, April 15. We understand that many priests gave copies of the letter to their parishioners to take home and discuss within their communities. We don't yet know how widespread knowledge of the letter is throughout Zimbabwe.

¶2. (C) We received some anecdotal reaction that ZANU-PF pushed back against some priests in Harare. At St. Gerrards Church on April 15, in the upscale Harare suburb of Borrowdale, Father Raymond Mupandusekwa read the letter to about 500 parishioners, including high-level ZANU-PF officials. Minister of Justice Patrick Chinimasa, in attendance, stood up with his wife and left. Chinimasa subsequently told Father Raymond that this kind of criticism of the government was not good for his career.

¶3. (C) Comment. The GOZ has in the past used its familiar divide and rule tactics to mute church criticism, co-opting some religious leaders while sanctioning critics. How it reacts to the priests who read and circulated the pastoral letter may depend on the government's perception of how widespread dissemination of the letter has been and how aggressively the Catholic Church pursues the letter's agenda. We will report septel.

DELL